

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

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INFO AMCONSUL HONG KONG PRIORITY

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AMEMBASSY TAIPEI PRIORITY

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 PEKING 134

E.O.11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, CH

SUBJECT: THE CHINESE LEADERSHIP

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1. SUMMARY. IN USLO'S ASSESSMENT OF THE NEW REGIME IN CHINA WRITTEN LAST NOVEMBER (REFTEL), WE SUGGESTED THAT THE NEW LEADERSHIP UNDER HUA WOULD HAVE TO ATTEND TO FOUR ITEMS OF UNFINISHED BUSINESS BEFORE MOVING FORWARD BOLDLY TO TACKLE PERSONNEL AND POLICY QUESTIONS. TWO MONTHS LATER HUA AND HIS COLLEAGUES RATE HIGH MARKS ONLY ON THE FIRST: INVESTIGATION OF THE RADICALS. MOUNTAINS OF EVIDENCE ON THE CRIMES, SCHEMES, AND ILLICIT CONNECTIONS OF THE "GANG OF FOUR" HAVE BEEN AMASSED AND CIRCULATED THROUGHOUT CHINA. AND THIS PROCESS IS CONTINUING. AS FOR THE OTHER TASKS:

--THE NEW LEADERSHIP HAS DEMONSTRABLY NEURTALIZED THE RADICALS' KEY ALLIES, BUT IT HAS SCARCELY BEGUN
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PARTY RECTIFICATION, LISTED BY HUA LAST DECEMBER 25 AS A MAJOR TASK FOR THE NEW YEAR BUT NOT MENTIONED SINCE IN THE NATIONAL PRESS.

--TENG HSIAO-PING REMAINS A CONTENTIOUS, PROBABLY CENTRAL, ISSUE. WITHOUT A RESOLUTION, THE FILLING OF VACANT SENIOR PARTY AND GOVERNMENT SLOTS CANNOT PROCEED AND THE LEADERSHIP WILL BE STALEMATED ON A RANGE

OF PRESSING DOMESTIC ISSUES. THE NATIONAL PEOPLE'S CONGRESS STANDING COMMITTEE MET BRIEFLY IN EARLY DECEMBER BUT, CONTRARY TO ADVANCE BILLING, FAILED TO APPROVE MAJOR "APPOINTMENTS AND DISMISSALS" SAVE A SWITCH OF FOREIGN MINISTERS.
--THE CONVOCAION OF A CENTRAL COMMITTEE PLENUM SEEMS INCREASINGLY UNLIKELY TO OCCUR BEFORE THE SECOND HALF OF 1977.

2. THE INITIAL EUPHORIA SURROUNDING THE PURGE OF THE RADICALS HAS DISSIPATED. THE ANTICIPATED RELAXATION IN CULTURE AND THE ARTS IS NOT YET VISIBLE ALTHOUGH SOME FORMERLY BANNED MOVIES ARE BEING SHOWN AND CERTAIN ACTORS AND ACTRESSES ARE BACK ON THE STAGE. ON THE PLUS SIDE THERE IS TALK OF A MORE RATIONAL EDUCATIONAL AND HEALTH POLICY. AND HUA HAS ACTED ASTUTELY TO CEMENT POPULAR SUPPORT BY RAPIDLY IDENTIFYING HIMSELF WITH PRAGMATIC ECONOMIC POLICIES, ALLOWING FOR SOME SLIGHT WAGE INCREASES AND RESTORATION OF CERTAIN MATERIAL INCENTIVES. BUT THESE POLICIES ALSO CARRY THE DANGER OF RAISING EXPECTATIONS TOO HIGH, TOO RAPIDLY, THUS CREATING A BACKLASH OF POPULAR SENTIMENT AGAINST HIM LATER. NONE OF US BELIEVE THAT IMMEDIATE AND SIGNIFICANT POLICY CHANGES--POLITICAL OR FINANCIAL--ARE NOW POSSIBLE.

3. SURROUNDING THE RECENT POSTER CAMPAIGN AT TIENANMEN (SEE USLO REPORTING) THE MAIN SUBJECT OF THIS MESSAGE--THERE IS A STRONG SCENT OF FACTIONAL INFIGHTING AND CONFIDENTIAL

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DEADLOCK. THE MAIN ISSUE IS PERSONALITIES--NOTABLY TENG--RATHER THAN POLICIES. FOR THE MOMENT HUA KUOFENG SEEMS TO HAVE WON THE WAR OF NERVES OVER THOSE CLAMORING FOR TENG'S RETURN. BUT MORE THAN EVER HUA PRESENTS A BLURRED IMAGE, SEEMINGLY A COMPROMISER PRECARIOUSLY BALANCED BETWEEN CONTENDING GROUPS AND, NOTWITHSTANDING DAILY MEDIA DESCRIPTION OF HIM AS "WISE," "BRILLIANT," AND "RESOLUTE," NOT A STRONG LEADER IN EITHER THE MAO OR CHOU MOLD.

4. WE FORESEE THAT THE NEW LEADERSHIP, THE TENG DILEMMA ASIDE, WILL STILL EXPERIENCE DIFFICULTY IN RECONSTRUCTING SWIFTLY THE PROVINCIAL AND NATIONAL LEADERSHIP, AND WILL OF NECESSITY DIRECT ITS ATTENTIONS PRIMARILY INWARD THROUGHOUT 1977. END SUMMARY.

5. BATTALIONS OF PEKING HOUSEWIVES, ARMED WITH BRUSHES AND BUCKETS, DESCENDED ON THE WOODEN FENCE AT TIENANMEN SQUARE IN THE DAWN HOURS OF JANUARY 16, SCRAPING IT

BARE OF ALL POSTERS, SLOGANS, AND GRAFFITI. ACROSS
CHANG AN STREET THOUSANDS OF WREATHS IN FRONT OF THE
FORBIDDEN CITY WERE STACKED UP IN TRUCKS AND DRIVEN
AWAY. THUS ENDED ONE WEEK OF POPULAR REVERENCE FOR
CHOU EN-LAI'S MEMORY COUPLED WITH OFTEN-STRIDENT
DEMANDS TO RESTORE TENG HSIAO-PING TO HIS PARTY AND
STATE POSITIONS.

6. BUT THE POLITICAL EQUATION SEEMS ODDLY UNCHANGED,
THE TOP LEADERS APPARENTLY STALEMATED. TENG'S RETURN--
"NOT IF, BUT WHEN" CHOU'S WIDOW TENG YING-CHAO REPORTEDLY
SAID--IS PUT OFF; NATIONAL LEADERS MAINTAIN AN UNUSUALLY
LOW PROFILE; NO EDITORIAL OR COMMENTARY ON DOMESTIC
ISSUES HAS BEEN PRINTED SINCE JANUARY 1; THE PRESS
CONTINUES ITS OBSESSIVE REVELATIONS CONCERNING
GANG OF FOUR MACHINATIONS IN EVERY SPHERE; AND HUA
KUO-FENG REMAINS, NOMINALLY, THE PARTY CHAIRMAN,
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PREMIER OF THE STATE COUNCIL, CHAIRMAN OF THE MILITARY
COMMISSION, AND MINISTER OF PUBLIC SECURITY.

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7. THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF CHOU'S PASSING SHOULD HAVE BEEN, AND WAS WIDELY EXPECTED TO BE, THE OCCASION FOR LEADERSHIP PARTICIPATION IN MEMORIAL OBSERVANCES. BUT THE TWO KEY SYMBOLIC DATES--CHOU'S DEATH ON JANUARY 8 AND THE JANUARY 15 PUBLIC MEMORIAL CEREMONY AT WHICH TENG DELIVERED THE EULOGY--PASSED WITHOUT ANY LEADERSHIP STATEMENT ON CHOU, WITHOUT ANY CEREMONY ATTENDED OR SANCTIONED BY THE LEADERSHIP, WITHOUT ANY EDITORIAL MARKING THE OCCASION, AND WITHOUT EVEN A WREATH SENT IN THE NAME OF THE POLITBURO TO BE PLACED AMONG THE THOUSANDS HONORING CHOU'S MEMORY AT TIENANMEN. ALL OF THIS SEEMS EVEN STRANGER SINCE ALL OF MY RECENT HIGH-LEVEL CONTACTS HAVE THEMSELVES BROUGHT UP THE GREATNESS OF CHOU, HOW MUCH THE PEOPLE LOVED HIM. ON TWO RECENT OCCASIONS CHOU WAS REFERRED TO OFTEN WHILE MAO WAS NOT EVEN MENTIONED.

8. ASKED BY A JOURNALIST WHY CHAIRMAN HUA AND SENIOR PARTY LEADERS HAD NOT SENT A WREATH, A CHINESE SPOKES-CONFIDENTIAL

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MAN ANGRILY RETORTED "THAT IS A RUDE QUESTION." BE THAT AS IT MAY, TO HAVE LET PASS AN OPPORTUNITY TO ASSOCIATE THEMSELVES WITH A REVERED LEADER INCREASINGLY ELEVATED TO STATURE COEQUAL WITH THAT OF MAO SUGGESTS SERIOUS DIVISIONS WITHIN THE TOP LEADERSHIP.

9. THE TENG HSIO-PING DILEMMA IS CLEARLY THE CONSUMING POLITICAL ISSUE--ONE HAVING DIRECT IMPLICATIONS FOR HUA'S AUTHORITY, FOR POPULAR PERCEPTIONS OF REGIME LEGITIMACY, AND FOR THE FATE OF THOSE LEADERS, IN PEKING AND THE PROVINCES, WHO IN 1975-76 ALIGNED THEMSELVES AGAINST TENG AND HIS POLICIES. THERE IS A POWERFUL IMPETUS TO BRING BACK TENG, AND QUICKLY. THE WEEK-LONG POSTER CAMPAIGN AT TIENANMEN, WHILE TAME BY COMPARISON WITH THE APRIL 1976 DEMONSTRATIONS, UNDERSCORES THE PASSIONS AROUSED BY THE ISSUE. BUT THERE MUST BE POTENT OPPOSITION TO BRINGING TENG BACK TO THE CENTER OF POWER, AT LEAST FOR THE MOMENT.

10. WE ASSUME THAT PARTY VICE CHAIRMAN AND DEFENSE MINISTER YEH CHIEN-YING, BACKED BY VETERAN LEADERS IN PEKING'S MILITARY AND STATE HIERARCHY AND BY CERTAIN REGIONAL MILITARY COMMANDERS, IS SPEARHEADING THE BRING-BACK-TENG MOVEMENT. AND WE SUSPECT THAT HUA KUO-FENG, SUPPORTED BY YOUNGER POLITBURO CIVILIANS AND PROBABLY BY SOME MILITARY LEADERS, IS STALLING.

11. YEH CHINE-YING, A LIFE-LONG ASSOCIATE OF CHOU EN-LAI, WAS UNABASHEDLY IN TENG'S CAMP FROM THE MOMENT THAT CHOU TAPPED TENG AS HIS SUCCESSOR. HE STRONGLY BACKED TENG'S 1975 PROGRAM FOR MILITARY MODERNIZATION; HE FAVORED TENG'S PRAGMATIC POLICIES ON EDUCATION AND THE DOMESTIC ECONOMY; AND HE WAS REPORTEDLY ENRAGED WHEN THE POLITBURO LAST JANUARY REFUSED TO CONFIRM TENG AS PREMIER.

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12. HUA'S ROLE IN THE EVENTS OF JANUARY/FEBRUARY 1976 WAS EQUIVOCAL, HOWEVER. ONE FINDS NO EVIDENCE OF POLITICAL TIES TO TENG; TO THE CONTRARY HIS START-LING APPOINTMENT AS "ACTING PREMIER" MADE HIM THE PRIME BENEFICIARY OF TENG'S FALL. HUA WAS A DARK HORSE, A COMPROMISE CANDIDATE, WHICH AT MINIMUM SUGGESTS THAT HE WAS NOT A VOCAL ADVOCATE OF TENG. MORE LIKELY, HUS ASSOCIATED HIMSELF WITH A LOOSE COALITION OF NON-GANG-OF-FOUR POLITBURO MEMBERS OPPOSED TO TENG: SHENYANG MILITARY COMMANDER LI TE-SHENG, PEKING PARTY BOSS WU TEH, MAO'S BODYGUARD WANG TUNG-HSING, VICE PREMIER CHI TENG-HUEI, AND PERHAPS PEKING MILITARY COMMANDER CHEN HSI-LIEN.

13. HUA, BACKED TODAY BY THIS SAME GROUP, PRESUMABLY OBJECTS TO TENG'S RETURN ON SEVERAL GROUNDS:
--TENG, WHO EMERGED UNCHASTENED FROM HIS FIRST POLITICAL DISGRACE TO WAGE A VENDETTA AGAINST HIS LEFTIST PERSECUTORS, IS PERFECTLY CAPABLE OF DEMANDING HIS POUND OF FLESH FROM MORE RECENT ADVERSARIES.

--

TENG'S RETURN, WHETHER AS PREMIER, VICE PREMIER, "ADVISER," OR PARTY SECRETARY-GENERAL, WILL CIRCUMSCRIBE HUA'S FREEDOM OF ACTION. TIENANMEN POSTER ASSERTIONS THAT "COMRADE TENG IS NOT AMBITIOUS," IF NOT CONSCIOUSLY SATIRICAL, CERTAINLY RING HOLLOW. ON THE RECORD THERE IS AMPLE REASON FOR CONCERN THAT THE STILL-VIGOROUS TENG MIGHT CHALLENGE HUA, TRY TO EDGE HIM ASIDE, OR SEEK TO KICK HIM UPSTAIRS TO PLAY THE ROLE OF SYMBOLIC LEADER, REVERED BUT DISTANT AND INEFFECTUAL.

14. IN ADDITION, ALL POLITBURO MEMBERS PROBABLY SHARE OTHER CONCERNS ABOUT TENG:

--TENG'S RETURN WILL CREATE A CRISIS OF LEGITIMACY

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IF NOT HANDLED WITH DEXTERITY. THE ENTIRE PARTY IS AWARE THAT MAO HIMSELF CASTIGATED TENG AS ONE WHO NEVER UNDERSTOOD CLASS STRUGGLE AND WHO SHOULD THEREFORE BE CRITICIZED. NO ONE WISHES TO OVERTURN MAO AND RISK OPENING THE PANDORA'S BOX OF DEMAOIZATION SO SOON; THIS COULD RAISE EMBARRASSING QUESTIONS ABOUT MAO'S ALLEGED "PERSONAL SELECTION" OF HUA. IF MAO WAS SENILE, MISTAKEN, OR MANIPULATED BY OTHERS IN THE CASE OF TENG, MANY WILL REASON, WHY SHOULD THEY THEN RESPECT MAO'S JUDGMENT CONCERNING THE UNPROVEN HUA.

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TENG'S PERSONALITY IS ABRASIVE AND HIS POLICY POSITIONS DIVISIVE AT A MOMENT WHEN CONSENSUS IS URGENTLY REQUIRED.

15. ASKED ABOUT THE MINICAMPAIGN AT TIENANMEN ON BEHALF OF TENG, OFFICIAL SPOKESMAN BLANDLY SUGGESTED TO JOURNALISTS (THOUGH NOT FOR ATTRIBUTION) THAT THE ENTIRE CHINESE LEADERSHIP THOUGHT TENG'S FORMAL REHABILITATION MUST FOLLOW SOME "POPULAR" MANIFESTATION OF SUPPORT FOR HIM. BUT WE SUSPECT THAT THE JANUARY 8-15 EVENTS WERE STAGEMANAGED BY YEH CHIEN-

YING AND OTHERS IN HOPES OF STEAMROLLING A RELUCTANT HUA INTO MAKING AN EARLY DECISION ON TENG. CERTAINLY THE MULTITUDE OF POSTERS, POEMS AND GRAFFITI CALLING ON HUA TO RETURN TENG "AT AN EARLY DATE" CONSTITUTED AN EMBARRASING FORM OF PUBLIC PRESSURE ON HIM.

61. THIS WAR OF NERVES APPARENTLY FAILED, THOUGH; THE POSTERS CAME DOWN, TENG HAS NOT YET EMERGED, AND
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CHINESE OFFICIALS WILLING TO DISCUSS TENG AT ALL HAVE BACKED AWAY FROM PREDICTING A SPECIFIC TIME OF REHABILITATION.

17. BUT IF HUA HAS WON A VICTORY, IT MAY BE PYRRHIC. SO LONG AS THE TENG PROBLEM CONTINUES TO FESTER, IT WILL INHIBIT THE LEADERSHIP FROM MOVING ON OTHER FRONTS. FURTHER, IT WILL DIVIDE, PERHAPS IRRETRIEVABLY, LEADERS WHO HAD EVERY INCENTIVE TO COOPERATE IN GETTING THE COUNTRY BACK ON TRACK.
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